

THE VISIBLE COSMOS OF DIALOGUES. SOME HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL REMARKS ABOUT PLATO IN THE LATE ANTIQUE SCHOOLS

Anna Motta*

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ABSTRACT: *Between the 5th and the 6th centuries A.D., the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria, where the philosophical school-teaching follows a specific cursus studiorum, is opened also to the Christian students. Despite some divergences of religious (but also of economical and of political) nature, and after some violent events which occur in the Egyptian city, the Alexandrian school is linked to its contemporary Neoplatonic school in Athens. Indeed the Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy, i.e. the introductory lectures discussed by an Anonymous professor in order to present the characteristics of Platonic philosophy, show that the method of teaching Plato is still the same. According to the Neoplatonic exegetical tradition, the text emphasizes that the dialogical artefact fashioned as a cosmos by Plato is a paideutic instrument with the purpose to look away from the sensible and to guide towards the intelligible. Plato, through dialogues, eikones of the invisible, does not create illusions, but contributes to the practice of 'assimilation' by filling the writings with greater contents.*

KEY-WORDS: Plato, Prolegomena, analogy, visible cosmos, invisible cosmos.

RESUMO: *Entre os séculos V e VI d.C., a escola neoplatônica de Alexandria, onde a didática filosófica segue um preciso cursus studiorum, é aberta também aos estudantes cristãos. Não obstante algumas diferenças de natureza religiosa (mas também econômica e política), e em seguida a alguns violentos acontecimentos que golpeiam a cidade egípcia, a escola de Alexandria permanece*

* MA in Classical Philology at the University of Naples Federico II and Ph.D. in Late Antique, Medieval and Humanistic Philosophy at University of Salerno

1. On this page see BRISSON (1987), p. 121-128 and BRISSON (2000), p. 209-218.
2. Cf. also Procl. *In Alc.* I, 10, 1-16.
3. PLEZIA (1949), p. 86, WESTERINK (1962), p. XLI = WESTERINK (1990), p. LXXV and MANSFELD (1994), p. 28 assume that Proclus' introductions to Aristotle and Plato were two distinct works. See also HADOT (1990), p. 31, who, on the contrary, believes in a united introduction to Aristotle and Plato.

The harmonious disposition and the balance of the parties, through the compliance of a general principle of convenience, determine the beauty of a λόγος. As Plato says:

Every speech (πάντα λόγον) must be composed as a living being (ζῶον) that should have its own body (σώμα τι ἔχοντα αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ), then it does not appear without head (μῆτε ἀκέφαλον) and feet, but it has the parts of the middle and those extremes written in a convenient way to one another and to the whole body (Phaedr. 264c)¹.

The quotation, from a dialogue considered theological in the Iamblichus' Canon, seems to me the right metaphor to submit, in this paper, a writing that acts as the 'head' of Neoplatonic teaching, as the proper introduction to Plato's λόγοι, as the preliminary passage to be able to get the unity of the Neoplatonic system.

The importance of prologues and the role of the image of the dialogue as a single living being, harmonious with itself in all its parts, are underlined in various ways by Proclus, who, moreover in a passage of the Commentary on the First Alcibiades, refers to what he has said "elsewhere" (καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις) about the dialogues in general². Unfortunately we don't have any Proclus' introductions³, but

ligada à contemporânea escola neoplatônica ateniense. E, de fato, os *Prolegomena* à filosofia de Platão, isto é as lições introdutórias dadas por um professor anônimo para apresentar as características da filosofia platônica, mostram que o método de ensinar Platão é ainda o mesmo. Seguindo a tradição exegética neoplatônica, o texto sublinha que o artefato dialógico, plasmado como um cosmo por Platão, é um instrumento paidêutico que tem o objetivo desviar o olhar do sensível e guiar rumo ao inteligível. Platão, através dos diálogos, eikones do invisível, não cria ilusões, mas contribui para a prática da “assimilação” preenchendo os escritos de maiores conteúdos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: Platão, *Prolegomena*, analogia, cosmo visível, cosmo invisível.

we have the text that marks in Alexandria the path of the ascent to Great Mysteries and proclaims not only the unity of a single dialogue, but the unity of the whole Platonic *corpus* in order to achieve a single purpose.

The Late Neoplatonists discuss, in some introductory texts, a set of preliminary questions, also called “headings” or “main points” (κεφάλαια), in order to clarify main issues. The importance of the κεφάλαια is underlined by Proclus who adds that this is the “model” pertinent to all Platonic dialogues:

On which and how many headings (κεφάλαια) must be distinctly described before the reading in class of the Republic of Plato by those who wish to interpret it correctly (ὁρθῶς) (In Remp.I, 1, 3-5)⁴.

The text under our attention provides information concerned with eleven sections. It presents preliminary matters to be treated and discussed before the study of Plato’s works may begin, before the συνανάγνωσις of Platonic dialogues according to a *schema isagogicum*⁵, as we can read:

The prolegomena to our joint reading of Plato’s philosophical works, comprised in eleven sections (ἐν ἑνδεκά κεφαλαίοις περικλεσθέντα)¹ (Prol. 28, 1-3).

The Anonymous *Prolegomena* to Platonic Philosophy, that is the complete title, are a compendium of speculation on the nature of the

Platonic dialogues: here we can find a large number of exegetical principles in quite explicit form. The text cannot be traced to any precise individual⁶, but it can be attributed to the Alexandrian Neoplatonic philosophical context of the 6th Century A.D. The Westerink’s edition is based on the Vienna manuscript, the codex *Vindobonensis phil. gr.* 314, written by John Grammaticus, a copy of the volume compiled by Arethus of Caesarea (10th Century A.D.). The work is didactic, prescriptive and descriptive in nature and, precisely because of this, it is interesting from the point of view of both form and content.

If we cannot say anything about the author, on the contrary we can present briefly the complex historical and religious context of the Egyptian city in order to construct the background to the school program. This context represents the essential framework which makes it possible to examine the role of the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria that, despite some divergences of various natures, is linked to its contemporary Neoplatonic school in Athens. The sources from the Athenian school are vital to this phase, given the scarcity of surviving sources from Alexandria⁷. The two schools share the same Neoplatonic teaching, but after 529 they divide their destiny. The Academy is closed instead the School of Alexandria stays open⁸.

But the Justinian ordinance of closing the school is not the only imperial action against the pagan culture. It is a real action, but among this and others more we can focus our attention on two interesting attempts of limiting the pagan sphere of influence. The ‘quasi-Justinian laws’ of Zeno in the *Codex Iustinianus* show the character of a Christian age in which pagan philosophy is seen as dangerous: moreover they seem to mark the differences between the fortunes of the two schools. The first ‘quasi-law’ denied the legality of testaments or gifts or anything given to persons or places for the support of the impiety of Hellenism. This law takes aim as well at attempts to increase the endowments that supported the late Hellenic παιδεία and its religious institutions. The second ‘quasi-law’ has a very important clause: it sets out to deny pagan professors of the Greek παιδεία the right to teach their ‘particular’ academic disciplines that destroy the souls of their students:

4. Cf. also Procl. *In Remp.* I, 5, 38-39 and MANSFELD (1994), p. 22.

5. HADOT (1990), p. 35 and PLEZIA (1949), p. 26, p. 70 want to derive the full-blown Neoplatonic *schemata isagogica* from Porphyry, but MANSFELD (1994), p. 20 also talks about the influence of Origen.

6. Because of the stratified character of the text we can’t say anything about its author. The Skowronski’s thesis, which ascribes the *Prolegomena* to Olympiodorus, is today not acceptable. In 1884 he argues that Olympiodorus wrote this introduction comparing his texts with some sections of the Anonymous. But these analogies are not sufficient, because – as Westerink has told – “none of these passages is characteristic in the sense that it expresses an opinion or idea of Olympiodorus not shared by others. Even the exordium (for which there is no traditional formula in the introductions to Porphyry and Aristotle) sounds like a commonplace. Several are demonstrably stock phrases. [...] Olympiodorus is the only Alexandrian whose commentaries on Plato have been preserved, and, with rare exception, it is in this part of his work that the parallels occur” (WESTERINK 1962, p. XLVI = WESTERINK 1990, p. LXXXII).

7. About the sources see MOTTA (2012).

8. Cf. SAFFREY (1954), p. 396-410, SEDLEY (1981), NAPOLI (2004), DI BRANCO (2006), p. 131-179 and NAPOLI (2008), p. 75-89.

We forbid every science (πᾶν δὲ μάθημα) to be taught by those who are sick with the madness of the Hellenes, that they might not according to this rule teach those who miserably approach them and destroy the souls of the persons supposedly studying truths with them (ταῖς δὲ ἀληθείαις τὰς τῶν δῆθεν παιδευομένων διαφθείρειν ψυχάς) (Cod. Iust. 1.11.10).

We have no convincing evidence that these Zeno's laws carried into effect⁹. For instance the endowments administered by the *diadochoi* in Athens survives the 'quasi-Justinian laws'¹⁰. Photius' summary of the *Vita Isidori* puts the endowment of 1000 solidi just in the time of Proclus¹¹ and moreover the Athenian decurion Theagenes, called φιλόδομος τε καὶ μεγαλόδομος, adds monies out of his own pocket for the philosophical institute of Athens¹².

If these and others private acts of generosity come during Marinus' tenure as *diaduchos*, Zeno could have allowed the force of the law to lapse after the successful suppression of Illus' revolt (481-488)¹³. This was a pagan's rebellion against the emperor Zeno raised by Illus, *magister militum per Orientem*, and his pagan faction of philosophers and rhetoricians who wanted to throw off the yoke of a Christian empire. So the emperor could have regarded the crowd of Hellenic philosophers, i.e. the mind of the rebellion, as something of little value. The state apparatus could not expeditiously suppress every pagan activity, although the degree of Christian belief varied considerably by locality and with the attitude of each individual monk or bishop and his congregation. Now it's impossible to overlook that Alexandria is the seat of one of the most important episcopate of the Late Antiquity. Moreover I think we could link up the increase of activities of *philoponoi*¹⁴ in Alexandria after the Illus' insurrection (and also after the Parolio's conversion to Christianity¹⁵) with the secret agreement between Ammonius and Peter Mongus, the patriarch of Alexandria. Damascius speaks about this act defining Ammonius as an opportunist (αἰσχροκερδής)¹⁶. Indeed if we associate the 'quasi-two laws', an attempt to limit the pagan teaching estimated unnecessary and not carried into effect, with the admission of some Christian students in the Neoplatonic school,

we can argue that the nature of the agreement is economical and political. However about the charge of opportunism and about the contents of the agreement the studies have divergent opinions¹⁷.

The method of teaching Plato doesn't change necessarily in Alexandria. The text quoted from Damascius doesn't say anything about the teaching but only about money: in fact we know that in these years Ammonius is in some financial troubles¹⁸. So what it's possible is that the social, economical and religious situation could have forced Ammonius to compromise with the Christian institution: the school of Alexandria already before Illus was a public institution (that is an important difference from Athenian school) founded on public funds. After Illus the imperial court must have cast distrustful glances on men like Ammonius: the philosophers were prominent supporters of Illus and Ammonius, who was a publicly funded teacher, was subject to close official scrutiny. This historical background and some matters are useful to demonstrate that the school of Alexandria in the Late Antiquity is a pagan institution, but it must come to terms to survive. It is probably that the result of the agreement is a school open also to Christian students like John Philoponus. So although the teaching extends across religious divides, it seems that the Christianity hasn't a deep influence on the Neoplatonic way to teach Plato¹⁹.

The 'theistic' system – as Praechter called Hierocles' metaphysics (PRAECHTER 1912, p. 1-27) – and the interpretation of Aristotle's God according to Ammonius seem rather inspired by pre-Plotinian Platonism and not so much by Christianity: Ilsetraut Hadot has demonstrated the fact that Hierocles nowhere refers to a principle above the Demiurge and therefore this topic doesn't imply that his philosophy is theistic (HADOT 1978, p. 189-171). Also the Ammonian metaphysics simplification isn't influenced by Christianity – as Verrycken has shown (VERRYCKEN 1990, p. 199-231) – although Praechter was not completely wrong in ascribing to Ammonius a regressive tendency. But not in all cases, we can say that the system is simplified because of the preparatory level of the texts. Unfortunately we have a lot of Alexandrian commentaries on Aristotle and only

9. That is the reason why we speak about 'quasi laws' according to TROMBLEY (1993-1994), vol. I, p. 327 ss.

10. We assign these 'quasi-laws' to 482-484, as Damascius reports in his work; see Dam. *Vita Is.* fr. 265, p. 213.

11. Cf. Dam. *Vita Is.*, *Epit. Phot.* 158, p. 212.

12. Cf. Dam. *Vita Is.*, fr. 264, p. 213.

13. Among the Hellenes who rallied to Illus we find the rhetor Pamprepis, who holds important imperial posts in Constantinople and has many friends with similar views in Alexandria.

14. *Philoponoi* are a confraternity of laymen whose members are especially dedicated Christians; for further information see HAAS (1997), p. 238-240.

15. About these facts see WATTS (2005), p. 204-261.

16. Cf. Dam. *Vita Is.*, fr. 316, p. 251 (= *Ep. Phot.* 292): ὁ δὲ Ἀμμώνιος αἰσχροκερδὴς ὢν καὶ πάντα ὅρα ἐκ χρηματισμῶν ὄντινα οὖν ὁμολογίας τίθεται πρὸς τὸν ἐπισκοποῦντα τηνικαῦτα τὴν κρατοῦσαν δόξαν. The Neoplatonists remain largely invisible in the political world. VAN DEN BERG (2005), p. 112 says that "living unnoticed, once an Epicurean vice, was turned into a Pythagorean, and hence Platonic, virtue".

Indeed Damascius, in his *Life of Isidore*, often like here, criticizes persons who, instead of pursuing philosophy, devote himself entirely to political office.

17. For bibliography on the historiographical problems see D'ANCONA (2005).

18. Cf. Dam. *Vita Is.* fr. 124, p. 105.

19. For example, Zacharia Scholasticus' dialogue, *Ammonius*, shows Ammonius' adherence to the doctrine of the eternity of the world. This text seems to reveal the bitterness that the *philoponoi* felt towards Ammonius and his teaching. Indeed, in the opening, Ammonius is described as an Athenian teacher who has come to Alexandria and teaches in such a way that he brings the ideas of many teachers into harmony; cf. Zach. *Amm.* 19-24.

very few texts on Plato, so we cannot compare with satisfactory results this production and the Athenian one. However, according to Saffrey, if Ammonius gives up teaching Platonic philosophy²⁰ – as Asclepius and Olympiodorus refer – the agreement with the Church probably doesn't affect the teaching of Plato (SAFFREY 1954, p. 400-401). So if we have not confirmation in the texts, we may say that, about the general method of teaching Plato, the Athenian and Alexandrian school are linked, although every philosopher has his theory and his preferences²¹. In the *Prolegomena* the general method of teaching Plato follows the Neoplatonic exegetical tradition, but sometimes the teacher, or in all probability the student²², who sorts out the notes on the lectures of Plato, handles some argument with care: the text seems to show respect also for the Christian cluster in the school. The teaching program shows the attempt to defend Plato against the charge of πολυδοξία through sharp examples of hermeneutics. So the Anonymous, through a synergy between philosophical, rhetorical and poetic structures, doesn't give up to introduce Plato as θεῖος ἀνὴρ and guide (καθηγητής) of divine wisdom: the harmonious unity of his life, his writings and doctrine show the importance of Hellenic παιδεία towards the attainment of knowledge of divine truth. Such knowledge is the goal of all philosophy and it can be reached through progressive stages that prepare to the study of Platonic philosophy²³.

The assumption of a teleological perspective on the analysis of the whole writing makes us possible to detect some exegetical and metaphysical structures constitutive of the Neoplatonic teaching in Late Antiquity. It is not superficial a text in which, for example, the *bios* does not offer a detailed progression of the episodes of Plato's life: more important is the relationship established with the divine, which is able to ensure the privileged access of the philosopher to the intelligible truth. It makes him the bearer of that divine gift, this is precisely the philosophy that in the *Timaeus* is necessary for the improvement of the human life²⁴. This aspect also characterizes the *Prolegomena Philosophiae* that are the more general *protreptici* in philosophy. In his introductory lectures Elias²⁵

stresses on the benefits brought by the philosophy: it is a great good (ἀγαθόν) and a gift of God, is divine and can make the philosopher like a God²⁶. David, who in order to conclude his introductory lectures, picks up the quotation of the same passage of the *Timaeus* which had been chosen by Elias to introduce, affirms that philosophy is a gift from God and its function is to confer prestige to the souls and bring them to the corporeality to what is divine²⁷. The divine man, or rather the one who is closer to the divine, is the philosopher, but not all philosophers are divine: Aristotle and Chrysippus extremely greedy for knowledge, referring, in fact, only to the study of what is human, do not attain the divine wisdom. Aristotle is for the Anonymous only δαιμόνιος like happens in Syrianus²⁸: his study is the ὄργανον necessary to continue the cognitive ascent²⁹. The Stagirite, together with Chrysippus, remains – in accordance with Damascius – φιλομαθής: θεῖοι are only Plato and Pythagoras, winged souls who dwell above the heavens, in the plain of truth and in the meadow of divine ideas³⁰.

However, one of the aspects perhaps more interesting of the *Prolegomena*, that I would try to examine here, is a sort of 'recasting' of the tale of the *Timaeus* where, in the original way, the dialogue is presented as a visible cosmos and Plato as the literary analogue of the cosmic Demiurge. In the *Timaeus*, the visible cosmos is a visible living creature embracing all that are visible (ζῶον ὁρατὸν τὰ ὁρατὰ περιέχον), a sensible divinity that is the image of the intelligible divinity (εἰκὼν τοῦ νοητοῦ θεὸς αἰσθητός)³¹. The consideration of these statements is the starting point of the third κεφάλαιον of *Prolegomena*, quoted below:

For just as God has made some parts of his creation invisible, namely all incorporeal beings, angels, souls, intelligences, etc., others, however, subject to our perception and visible, such as for example the heavenly bodies and the world of coming-to-be and passing-away, so Plato too (οὕτως καὶ αὐτός) has handed on some of his ideas in writing and some by word of mouth, like incorporeal entities, imperceptible to the senses, namely what he said in his lectures (Prol. 13, 18-25)³².

20. It's certain that he writes a commentary on the *Phaedo* (cf. Olymp. In *Phaed.* 7, 5; 8, 17; 10, 7) and on the *Gorgias* (cf. Olymp. In *Gorg.* 39, 2) and some lectures on *Theaetetus* (cf. Ascl. In *Met.* 70, 31).

21. Indeed Ammonius may have preferred to develop his Neoplatonic and harmonizing exegesis of Aristotle. This could also be the reason why the Platonic works were felt to be less important.

22. The character of mistakes that we found (for instance wrong names of dialogues, of persons and other inaccuracies) let us tell that the *Prolegomena* are not be destined for publication or circulation outside the school. We cannot forget that sometimes commentaries and introductions are ἀπὸ φωνῆς: they are not physically written by professors, but also by students. See RICHARD (1950), p. 191-222.

23. Cf. MANSFELD (1994), p. 108-113, HADOT (1984), p. 201 ss. and HOFFMANN (2000), p. 611-612.

24. Cf. Plat. *Tim.* 47b.

25. El. *Prol. phil.* 2, 1.

26. Cf. Plat. *Theaet.* 176b. About this concept see LAVECCHIA (2006), *passim* and O'MEARA (2003), p. 31-49.

27. Cf. Dav. *Prol. phil.* 79, 1.

28. Cf. Syr. In *Met.* 86, 7; 115, 25; 168, 6; 192, 16. On Syrianus' criticism see CARDULLO (1995) and (2000).

29. Cf. El. In *An. Post.* 123, 9-11.

30. Cf. Dam. *Vita Is. fr.* 36, p. 60 (= *Epit. Phot.* 36). In fact, Plato is presented in the *Prolegomena* as a wingless student. After Socrates' teaching is able to find those wings that in the *Phaedrus* (246d6-8) represent the part that has been taken part to the divine and makes possible to rise him up (ἀγειν ἄνω, *Phaedr.* 247d6). The philosopher, in the *Republic* (500c9-501b7), is divine and orderly so far as a man is conceded, just because he sees and contemplates the ordered and always unchanged reality.

31. Cf. Plat. *Tim.* 92c4; 27c-29d; 30c-d.

32. See also Procl. In *Crat.* IV, 16-18; III, 10-11; VI, 11-14; VIII, 11-13; XI, 2-4, where the author conceives the words as εἰκόνες of the intelligible.

The possibility to see in Plato a divine artisan seems to me, however, an idea already foreseen in the section of the *Prolegomena* in which the Alexandrian professor expresses his personal views about the development of various philosophical doctrines of the antiquity. So in his program the Anonymous shows the συμφωνία between the different theological traditions, an essential aspect in the Athenian school³³. He cites firstly the αἴρεσις of poets Orpheus, Homer, Musaeus and Hesiod. Plato has just learned from them to enhance the order of the universe. Nevertheless, he is superior to the poets because, while they have spoken with no evidence, he has demonstrated the truth of his words and has used the myths with correctness³⁴. It is clear that Plato is not only a poet when he 'creates' the dialogues but he is, in a broader sense, a demiurge. Actually the philosophical work, in the presentation of the Anonymous, does not exclude the poetry. In addition, every production – for Plato – is poetry: adapted from the *Symposium*³⁵, all demiurges might be called 'poets' because their activity involves a 'creation'; nevertheless, some call 'poets' only the men who deal with music and verses. It doesn't astonish that the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* is defined as the ποιητής καὶ πατήρ: his work, like the poet one, μίμησις of a paradigm, is also a γένεσις.

Even if the creative activity belongs to the poet and to the philosopher, the demiurgic product is different. In the *Phaedo* – the dialogue whose exegesis comes from the Anonymous primarily to underline, in the new reading of the image of the swan, the Apollonian character of Plato³⁶ – Socrates receives in a dream the invitation to compose and perform music, as the philosophy was the highest music³⁷. If the highest form of music is the philosophy, Proclus can argue that this is moreover:

The most intense form of love, because the philosophy does not grant any money, but the soul itself with the most perfect form of harmony, whereby the soul is able to bring order to everything concerning men, and at the same time, to raise in a perfect way hymns in honor of the divinity, imitating the same μουσικήτης, which celebrates the Father with intellectual songs and holds together the entire universe with indissoluble bonds,

moving everything together, as stated by Socrates in the Cratylus. The music divinely inspired is close to the philosopher (διὸ καὶ τὴν ἔνθεον μουσικὴν παρὰ τῷ φιλοσόφῳ πρῶτως) (In Remp. I, 57, 10-17).

The philosophy, the highest form of music, harmonizes the soul with the entire universe: with this kind of philosophy Plato, the best musician, may bring order to everything and celebrate the divine.

Plato, to which in the *bios* of the *Prolegomena* are associated 'symbols' commonly attributed to poets, is the one that – as stated clearly in Proclus – by imitating the cosmic activity of μουσικήτης, becomes the creator of a cosmos of high music. The philosopher, divinely inspired, writes because he 'sees' and his writing is a 'put before the eyes'³⁸: it is the sight – as stated in the *Timaeus* and in accordance with a typical conception of the Greek thinking – the most powerful and effective of our senses³⁹. From the observation of the reality is derived the stimulus to the reasoning, and then to the philosophy, and from the observation of the order of the cosmos, derives the criterion by which adjusting our behavior in intellectual and moral terms. It is no coincidence that the *Prolegomena* start with the well-known opening words of Aristotelian *Metaphysics*. The senses are tools of human knowledge, because through the sensible objects we reach the reminiscence⁴⁰.

In this perspective, the image becomes an educational tool for mediation: it brings a message able to connect, making evident the different levels of reality because the whole universe is pervaded by an analogy⁴¹. According to Proclus, in the *Prolegomena*, Plato seems to have understood the invisible structure of the cosmos and the iconic relationship between the intelligible and the sensible: so, only through the medium of images, he can represent the divine cosmos. The testimony of Proclus is, once again, essential to clarify this matter. By comparing the two dialogues which conclude the Neoplatonic curriculum, he writes:

The whole of philosophy being divided into study of intelligible and study of immanent things – quite rightly too, as cosmos too is twofold, intelligible cosmos and sensible cosmos as Plato will go on to say – the Parmenides has embraced the treatment of intelligibles,

33. Cf. Procl. *Theol. Plat.* I, 5, 25-26, 4 and Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 46.

34. Cf. Anon. *Prolog.* 7, 19-24.

35. Cf. Plat. *Symp.* 205c.

36. Cf. Anon. *Prolog.* 1, 26-33; 1, 54-60; 2, 15-29.

37. Plat. *Phaed.* 61b.

38. See also Arist. *Rhet.* III, 1411b22 and *Poet.* 17, 1455b23.

39. Cf. TATARKIEWICZ (1976), p. 105-197; 355-381.

40. Cf. also Anon. *Prolog.* 1, 5.

41. About the use of metaphor cf. ECO (1984), p. 161-165.

and the *Timaeus* that of the sensibles. That one, you see, teaches us all the divine orders, and this one all the processions of things in the cosmos. But neither does the former entirely leave aside the study of things within the All, nor does the latter fail to study the intelligible, because sensible too are present paradigmatically in the intelligibles (τὰ αἰσθητὰ ἐν τοῖς νοητοῖς ἐστὶ παραδειγματικῶς), while the intelligibles are present iconically among sensible (καὶ τὰ νοητὰ ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς εἰκονικῶς) (*In Tim. I*, 132, 21-27).

The analogy – the most important type of metaphor, as Aristotle confirms⁴² – here is the privileged instrument of the philosopher: this rhetoric figure is what permits to switch constantly from one world to another. But in order to get such analogy is necessary that a similarity derives from the equality relations between four elements, for example, between things totally different, such as the Demiurge and Plato, and the world and the dialogues. What the Anonymous creates is the following connection: the Demiurge moulds the visible cosmos as Plato moulds the dialogues. Plato resembles the Demiurge as well as the relationship between Plato and the dialogues resembles the relationship between the Demiurge and the sensible cosmos. If the dialogue were not a properly Platonic creation, between the Demiurge and Plato would not exist metaphor. This analogy permits to consider the analogical relationship between the One and the σκοπός of the dialogues. If the One is the inexhaustible source, absolutely unique and simple from all that exists, in a similar way, the σκοπός, by harmonizing all the elements of the universe present in individual dialogues, gives completeness and unity to each single λόγος and makes it a literary microcosm that can reflect the structure of the universe-macrocosm (COULTER 1976, p. 95-126). The Anonymous builds an educational way to reach the divine truth: in fact by capturing the similarities and relationships between macrocosm and microcosm, he makes the invisible available for learning.

The supreme literary artist is thus the organizing mind that holds together, by giving harmony, the components of the dialogic universe. He is the one who ‘makes visible’, ἐν τούτῳ τὸ θεῖον

μιμούμενος, and is able to get the analogy between macrocosm and microcosm. In fact, the Anonymous writes:

As we have seen, then, that the dialogue is a cosmos and the cosmos a dialogue, we may expect to find all the components of the universe in the dialogue. The constituents of the universe are these: matter (ύλη), form (εἶδος), nature (φύσις) – which unites form with matter –, soul (ψυχή), intelligence (νοῦς) and divinity (θεότης) (*Prol. 16*, 3-7).

Proclus also says in the Commentary on the First Alcibiades that dialogue must show close analogies with the All according to five points of reference (he omits, however, the nature) Good, Intellect, Soul, Form and matter⁴³. It is therefore evident that the text is the opening to a literary microcosm in which the hierarchies present in the macrocosm are reflected and in which the Demiurge works to harmonize all the diversity of creation⁴⁴.

In this way in the *Prolegomena* to the matter of the universe concerns the setting for the work, the characters involved, the circumstances of the action; to the cosmic form the style; to the nature the method of exposition; to the soul the arguments; to the intellect the problem examined; to the divinity the end of the composition. So if the Good is that in view of which the dialogue is written, the analogy between a theory of the six causes (material, formal, efficient, exemplary, instrumental and final) and the literary production is also justified: here the Good is clearly the final cause⁴⁵. In fact God creates, being aware of the good that his creation brings. The Good is the reason why it is created and the aim, the cause of creation itself⁴⁶. Similarly and according to *Timaeus* 29d-30a⁴⁷, the relationship between creator and artifact is seen in terms of final cause⁴⁸. This one is then the speculative-philosophical foundation on which is based the literary theory of unity as it is expressed by the Anonymous:

One or many: we must maintain that a dialogue has one theme, not many. How indeed could Plato treat more than one theme in a dialogue, when he praises

42. Arist. *Rhet.* III 1411 a1; cf. PALUMBO (2008), p. 538 ss.

43. Cf. Procl. *In Alc.* I, 10, 1-16.

44. Cf. Plat. *Tim.* 30a; *Tim.* 52d-53b. Cf. also Procl. *El. Theol.* 103.

45. Cf. Anon. *Prol.* 17, 40-48.

46. Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 6, 1450a22-23; 6, 1450a38; 23, 1459a16-20.

47. Cf. also Plat. *Tim.* 46c- 47c.

48. Cf. Procl. *In Tim.* I, 271, 11-15 and 335, 21-23. Cf. also Procl. *In Parm.* III, 831, 11-13; *In Remp.* I, 32, 27-29; *Syr. In Met.* 117, 20-25.

the deity for the very reason that is one (τὸ θεῖον ὅτι ἓν ἐστίν)? Besides, he says himself that the dialogue is like (ἔοικεν) a living being, because it is a λόγος; any well-written piece of literature can be compared (ἀναλογεῖ) to a living being; if, then, the dialogue is comparable to a living being, and a living being has only one purpose, the Good (for the sake of which it has been created), the dialogue must also have one purpose, that is, one theme (ἓνα σκοπόν) (Prol. 21, 23-32).

Therefore, if the various literary elements are similar to a theological level or metaphysical reality, there is no other way to speak about the metaphysical reality, in the educational field, that building a model able to express in a figurative way that what the philosopher thinks is the nature of that reality. The demiurgic model is not yet easy to manage: for example, Plotinus considers that the schemes of the craft production do not suit a Demiurge⁴⁹. Actually he criticizes the superfluous inventions of the Gnostics, among which there is the Demiurge borrowed from Plato⁵⁰. Plotinus' philosophy, which denounces the errors in the image, does not represent the hermeneutic way pursued by Iamblichus who says that the art of making images is at a great distance from the Demiurge who creates real beings, because the production reverses the sense of divine production. In fact, the God produces from the Intelligibility, the man from the matter: so all the images, that do not refer to the divine and which are not based on his power, "goes up in smoke"⁵¹.

In light of this, the dialogue, creature of the divine platonic δημιουργεῖν, is not important as a well-defined literary genre, instead is important that to which the image refers, or rather, the intelligibility. The creation of images, activity usually related, but not always with a positive sense, to the poets, becomes a mean of transmission of philosophical λόγοι. What in fact escapes the gaze of the mind cannot escape the "third eye" of Plato⁵². Through the dialogues, εἰκόνες of the invisible, he does not create illusions, but contributes to the practice of 'assimilation' by filling the written with greater and divine contents⁵³. Plato is precisely mediator through the literature between the invisible and visible, between the intelligible and the sensible⁵⁴.

The terms in which the literary theory is exposed make evident the fortune of the exegesis of the passage of the *Phaedrus* quoted at the beginning and of course the Neoplatonic exegesis of the *Timaeus*. The report with the Unity is the greatest concern of the Neoplatonic philosophers that make full use of the metaphor of *Phaedrus* and of the tale of *Timaeus*⁵⁵, and it is also what joins the different schools: if a work has not literary unity, determined not only by its biological structure but also by its purpose, that is the Good, it may not be intelligible or Beautiful. The Beautiful is related to the Good: it is the way in which, since Plotinus, the Good is at the level of the sensible cosmos⁵⁶.

However, the argument that predicts the metaphors, invites us to consider the possibility that the use of a demiurgic image, with the combination of Plato to the divinely inspired poets, is born here, *in primis*, from the necessity to justify the adoption of a philosophical writing. In fact, in an educational field, before teaching the truth of the Plato's doctrine, it has been necessary to liberate the divine philosopher, man of the Muses, from any charge of incoherence. The adoption of a written form for the transmission of his teaching is in contradiction with his initial preference, on the example of Socrates and Pythagoras, for a continuation of disciples, real living books. The ἀπορία of the dialogues – as defined by the Anonymous⁵⁷ – can be overcome only by approaching analogically the composition of literature to the demiurgic creation with its biological and teleological reliefs. The justification for using dialogues, living being in this visible cosmos, through an exegetical procedure that uses the analogy, aims to introduce the philosophical wisdom, also in Alexandria, as a divine revelation.

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49. About the Demiurge in Plotinus see OPSOMER (2006).

50. Cf. Plot. *Enn.* II 9 [33], 6.1-62.

51. Iambl. *De myst.* 168, 11-15 and 171, 17-172, 9. About the importance of the representation of the invisible cf. also Porph. *Peri agalm.* fr. 1.

52. Cf. Anon. *Prol.* 5, 51-52.

53. BONFIGLIOLI (2008), p. 129 says that "nel tardoantico, i confini imposti dalla ricerca filosofica attraverso le parole sono confini troppo stretti, perché è lo stesso pensiero filosofico che supera le soglie della sua identità per aprirsi ad altre suggestioni. Suggestioni che parlano essenzialmente di rimozioni o almeno di tendenza alla rimozione: dell'assenza, del falso, del rinvio".

54. Cf. COULTER (1976), p. 39-60.

55. BRISSE (2000), p. 216 writes that "l'assimilation du logos au kosmos comme être vivant subit un glissement significatif de la biologie vers la téléologie".

56. Cf. Plot. *Enn.* VI 9 [9], 11.

57. Cf. Anon. *Prol.* 13, 4.

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